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Tatiana Pang

**A Manchu-Mongolian Diploma Given
to the Wife of a Mongolian Nobleman**

Abstract: One of the imperial diplomas from the collection of the Institute of Oriental Manuscripts was written in both Manchu and Mongolian languages and given to the wife of a Mongolian nobleman Subdubdorji conferring on her the title *wife of beise*. The decoration of the diploma and accordion-type binding show that the owner was of high position. An analysis of the text suggests that it was originally written in Mongolian and then translated into Manchu. Patents granting hereditary ranks and titles to Mongols were issued in Beijing by the Board of Colonial Affairs and then sent to Mongolia. Only few of them are known to have been given to women, one of those is published in the article.

Key words: Manchu-Mongolian diploma, Qianlong, Board of Colonial Affairs, Qing dynasty, *beise*

The Institute of Oriental Manuscripts, RAS, in St. Petersburg holds a number of imperial diplomas given to various Manchu noblemen in recognition of their good service to the Qing court. The texts are written in Manchu and Chinese on multicolored silk, which is mounted on paper and folded as a handscroll.¹ The diplomas certify that their holders had been promoted in rank or given a hereditary title; the wives of those people were also given honorary titles. One of these 16 imperial patents stands out for its form: it is folded in accordion-type binding and fixed between cardboard covers.² The text is written in Manchu and Mongolian in red ink inside a hand-painted silver frame with dragons and clouds, and there are ascending and descending dragons on both sides of the scroll, which is folded like an accordion with each page containing seven lines of text. The entire text is written on yellow silk mounted on paper; the cardboard cover of the binding is wrapped in faded red silk. This unusual form suggests that the patent was given to someone who was close to the imperial family.

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¹ PANG 2001, 41–61.

² PANG 2001, 44–45; call number C 30 mss.

Comparison of Manchu and Mongolian versions of the text showed that the contents are identical.

Transliteration from Manchu:

Abkai hesei forgon be aliha./

hûwangdi hesel

wang ni ilhi ofi. wesihun be isibure be dahame. kesi be / selgiyere de jergi bi. dorgi durun be tob obufi. jergi be tuwame / obure be dahame. sain be fungnere de ilgarakû. yargiyan-i doroi / miyamigan de acanaci kesi hese be isibure giyan. Kalkai jasak gûsai / beise Sundubdorji-i sirame gaiha sargan sula uksun Yung Šeo-i / sargan jui. sini banin ging-gung olhoba. erdemu nesuken nemgiyen eigen de // aisilame. boode durun ilibufi. dasara teksilere wen yongkiyafi dorgideri / aisilahangge yargiyan-i ambula. tutu simbe beise-i fujin / fungnefi hoošan-i abdangga fungnehen buhe. beise de holbohongge wesihun / derengge juru akû / juk-tere amsun be bolgomime hiyoošun ginggun be / endeci acambil/ wesihun oho seme / ume coktoloro/ kesi be aliha / seme ume dabašara ginggule.//

Abkai wehiyehe dehi uyuci jorgon biyai juwan uyun.//

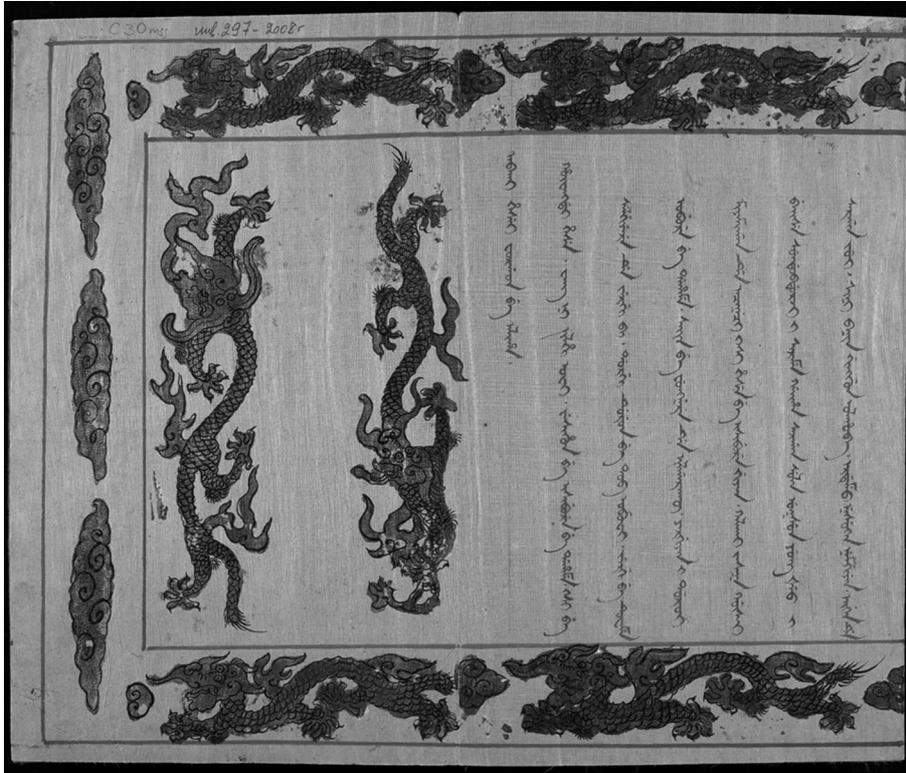
Transliteration from Mongolian:

Tngri-yin bošoy-iyar caγ-i ejelegsen

Quwangdi-yin jarliγ

Wang-un ded bolγad. erkim-i kurtegekui-yin tulada. kesig-i tongyalaqui-dur jerge bui: toto γadu keb-i tob bolγad. jerge-yi inu ujeju bo yaqui-yin tulada. sayin-i ergumjilekui-dur iγaquugei. uneger yosotu cimeg-tur neilelcebesu. kesig jarliγ-i kurtegeku jokistai bui. Qalq-a-yin jasaγ qosi γun-u beyise Sondobdorji-yin qoyitu abuγsan gergei uqaγ-a jug šeo-yin okin. cini torolki inu kiciyrnggui ayumdaqu. erdem inu dolgen tuliyeen nokur-tegen tusalaju gerte keb bayγulju jasaqu ba tengsileku soyul-i tegusaged. dotuγar-iyar tusalaysan anu uneger yeke bolai. teyin ku camayi beyise-yin qatun ergumjileged. caγasun-u nabcitu ergumjilel soyuqabai. Beyise-dur qolbaγsan anu erkim niγurtai qoyar ugei. takiqujoγoy-i ari γulaju takiydaqū kiciyenggui-yi uriddabasu jokimui erkim bolbai kemen buu omurqa γdun. kesig-i kurtebei kemen buu rasi γura γdun. kiciyenggui-ile.

Tngri-yin tedgugsen-u dosin yisuduger on ebul-un segul sar-a yin ar-ban yisun:

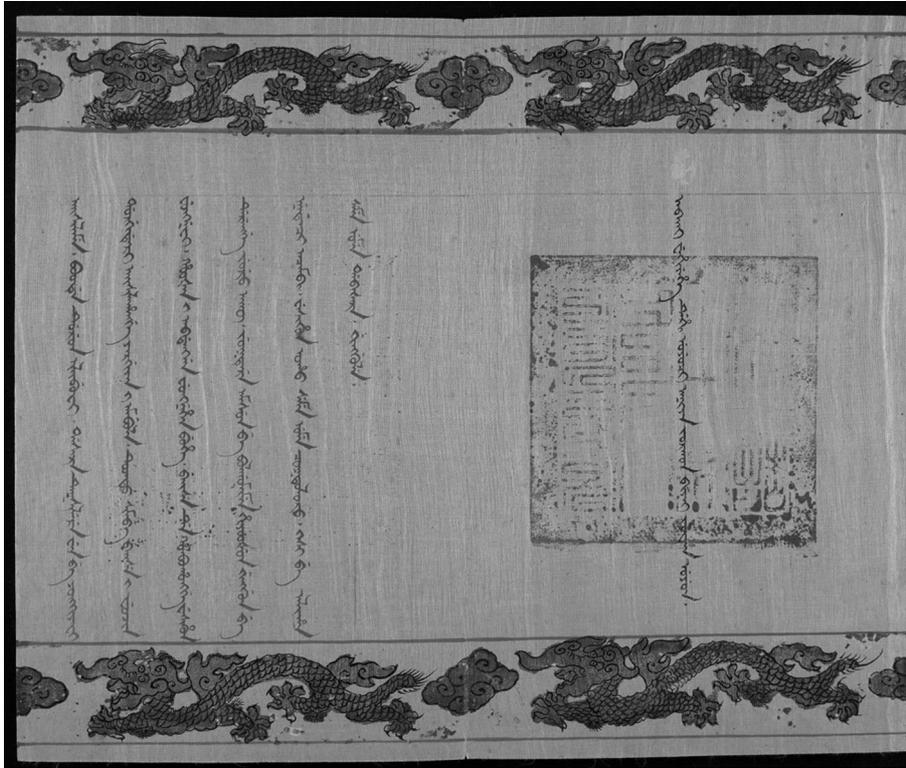


Translation from Manchu:

“Edict of the Emperor who received the ruling power by the Will of Heaven.

There is a procedure for granting the title of *wang* and rewards. Keeping the inside order and following the rules, we distribute our kindness and mark good [deeds]. If we follow the real rule of state moral, then she deserves to be bestowed the emperor’s edict favor.

The second wife of Sundubdorji [in the Mongolian version: Sondobdorji.—*T. P.*], *Khalkha jasak gusai beise*, a daughter of the Yung Šeo clan! Your natural character is respectful and attentive. You help your husband virtuously, tenderly and gently. You maintain the order of the house; you control, put in order and cultivate the household; you greatly support [your husband] from inside.



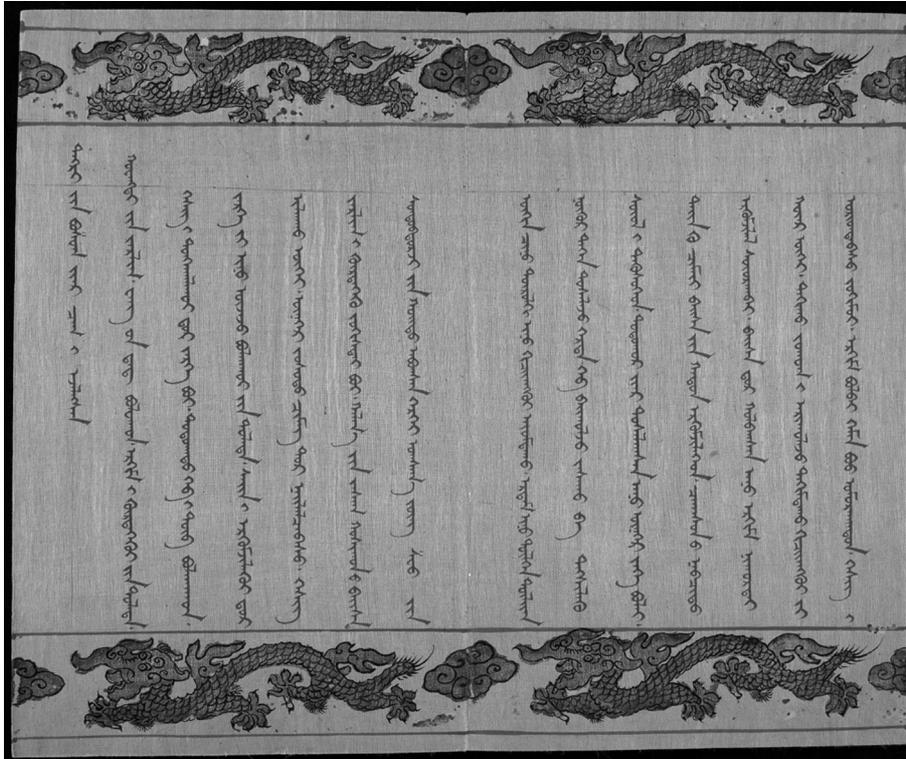
For this reason I confer on you the title of *wife of beise* and reward you with a patent on yellow paper. Being married to a *beise*, honorable and noble—nobody could be compared to you. Fast and abstain from sacrificial food, carry out your duties according to the rules of respect. Being honored, do not be arrogant! Receiving my benevolence, do not be presumptuous (extravagant), act respectfully!

19th day of the 12th moon, 49th year of Abhai wehiyehe [January 29, 1785]”

This rather brief document is very informative.

First of all, its structure is typical of all imperial Patents by Ordinance—*gaoming* and Patents by Command—*zhiming*. Patents by Command were issued to award special honorary titles to meritorious people from the dependencies of the empire, including Mongolia.³ It begins with a didactic

³ VEIT 2006, 247.



part which states that the emperor should respect those who have helped him; then comes the name of the person with his full title and description of his meritorious achievements for which he is being honored (in our case, the second wife of Sundubdorji); a description of the award (in our case, the title of wife of *beise*); and, as a conclusion, the emperor's didactic advice regarding future behavior.

One personal name is mentioned in the diploma: it is the *Khalkha jasak gusai beise* Sundubdorji. Most probably this name can explain the unusual appearance of the diploma: hand-painted dragons and accordion type binding. Indeed, we do find this name among the biographies of North Mongolian aristocrats mentioned in the Mongolian *Iedkel šastir* of 1795, which was translated into German by Veronika Veit in 1990.⁴ There we read:

⁴ VEIT 1990, Bd. 2, 68.

“Sondubdorj⁵ was the eldest son of Čebdendorji and in the 39th year of Qianlong (1774) he became the sixth heir (successor) of the *Jasa Qosiyin-u beise*.⁶ In the 44th year of Qianlong [1771]⁷ he was sent as an attaché to the Gate of Celestial Purity [Qianqingmen]. The same year he accompanied the Emperor during a hunt in the imperial hunting ground and for that he was awarded a two-eyed peacock-feather. After that he served as a deputy commander and as a minister *Qoubu-yin sayid*.⁸ In the 46th year of Qianlong [1781] he was promoted by imperial decree to the rank of *beise*.⁹ In the 48th year of Qianlong [1783] Sondubdorji was appointed a commander.”

From this biography we see that in 1779 Sundubdorji was a Mongolian envoy to ceremonies at Qianqingmen when Mongolian aristocrats were presented to the Emperor and the Emperor rewarded them for their good deeds and made promotions.¹⁰ The same year Sundubdorji accompanied Emperor Qianlong during the annual autumn hunt in the Muran imperial hunting ground north of Jehol. For that he was awarded a two-eyed peacock-feather—an insignia of the second grade. In 1781 he was given the rank of *beise*, which means a prince of the 4th grade.

Our diploma was given to the second wife of Sundubdorji in 1785. Since he was a high ranking Mongolian aristocrat who was personally introduced to the Emperor, the text of the diploma to his wife is specially ornamented with a hand-painted frame. At the end of the text the emperor gives her advice about her behavior: “Fast and abstain from sacrificial food, carry out the duties according to the rules of respect. Being honored, do not impose (surpass)! Receiving my benevolence, do not be presumptuous (extravagant), act respectfully!” These, rather strict, recommendations were most probably prompted either by her young age or her arrogant temper.

An analysis of the Manchu and Mongolian versions suggests that the text was originally written in Mongolian and then translated into the Manchu language. This conclusion derives from the Manchu sentence *beise de hol-bohongge wesihun / derengge juru akû*: “Being married to *beise*, honorable

⁵ In our Manchu text the name is written as Sundubdorji, in Mongolian — Sondobdorji.

⁶ *Jasak*—a military and administrative commander of a Mongolian division.

⁷ This is a misprint: Qianlong 44 is 1779, not 1771. According to Veit, Sondubdorji was at Qian-qing-men and in Muran in 1779 (VEIT 1990, Bd. 1, 144); in 1779 he received a feather (VEIT 1990, Bd. 1, 146); in 1783 he was given the position of commander (VEIT 1990, Bd. 1, 133).

⁸ *huvin sait*—minister.

⁹ *beise*—prince of the fourth rank.

¹⁰ VEIT 1990, Bd 1, 59.

and noble—nobody could be compared [with her].” The Manchu word *juru* means “pair, doubled, even number,” therefore *juru akû* is “no pair, not doubled”—“honorable and noble—not doubled.” The parallel Mongolian sentence is *erkim ni yurtai qoyar ugei* where according to Osip (Józef Szczepan) Kowalewsky’s “Mongolian-Russian-French Dictionary” *qoyar ugei* also has the meaning of “there is no one equal or comparable.”¹¹ This meaning was used by the translator from Mongolian into Manchu: according to the available dictionaries this additional meaning does not exist in the Manchu language. Moreover, the Mongolian script occasionally omits dots near the vowels, while the Manchu script is more precise and clear. Thus the name given in the Manchu text would be pronounced Sundubdorji, while in Mongolian we find Sondubdorji (without a dot in the first syllable). These small hints allow us to surmise that the original text was written in Mongolian and then translated into Manchu.

Various types of imperial diplomas and patents have already been discussed in the literature,¹² but very few of them were given to women. The earliest known is the patent given in 1636 to the Mongolian lady Bumbutai, who was a *zhuangfei* concubine of Hong Taiji. The diploma is kept at the Shenyang Gugong palace museum and was published by Wang Peihuan in 1998.¹³ Another known text, the Manchu-Mongolian patent given to the first wife of the Mongolian *jasak and qoşoi sečen wang* Maqasuqa, is at the Library of the Academy of Social Sciences in Hohhot and was published by Veronika Veit in 2006.¹⁴

The earliest document was presented to Bumbutai in the Manchu capital Mukden (Shenyang), while the SECOND patent to have been sent to Mongolia was issued in 1779. The patent published above is dated 1785 and was also sent to Mongolia. Patents of hereditary and honorary titles for Mongolian aristocrats were issued in Beijing and sent to the Outer Territories. The Regulations of the Board of Colonial Affairs contain a special paragraph on sending imperial patents to the wives of Mongolian aristocrats: “The patents and imperial letters to Mongolian khan ladies and princesses of the first two grades (*fujin*), princesses (*fujin*) of the third, fourth, fifth and sixth grades, wives of *taiji* (*sargasa*), Manchu princesses (*gege*) who are married to Mongolian princes should not be sent by special envoy. The Board of Colonial Affairs may send them by post at first convenience with the troop com-

¹¹ KOWALEVSKY 1846, vol. 2, 946.

¹² FRANKE 1942; PANG, 2013.

¹³ WANG 1998.

¹⁴ VEIT 2006.

mander. He should register how many patents he received and when he delivered them. This record should be kept in the Board of Colonial Affairs. In the event of patents being destroyed by natural disaster or stolen, they can be renewed without investigation and punishment.”¹⁵

Hereditary and honorary diplomas were sent to the Outer Territories from the Manchu court, which in this way emphasized the idea of one *gurun*, a word that in Manchu carries a variety of meanings from “country,” “nation” or “people” to “dynasty” and “court”—“all ranked officials were representatives of the monarch—their authority was vested in the dynasty’s legitimacy, and vice versa.”¹⁶ The Emperor cares and shows respect for all the efforts of his subjects to serve the common country which is seen as a big family. But the welfare of the *gurun* depended on individual dedication to “family duty,” and this notion is clearly evident even in the brief text of the diploma from the St. Petersburg IOM RAS collection.

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¹⁵ LIPOVTSOV 1828, vol. 1, 310.

¹⁶ ELLIOTT 2001, 164.

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